

Leflunomide: a new DMARD for rheumatoid arthritis

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Early diagnosis and referral of rheumatoid arthritis may significantly improve patient outcomes. Arava (leflunomide) is the first new disease modifying antirheumatic drug (DMARD) to be introduced in the UK for over a decade. Arava has a rapid onset of action and has been shown to retard radiographic disease progression and significantly improve patients' functional ability.

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KEY POINTS

- To prevent irreversible joint damage, rheumatoid arthritis (RA) must be diagnosed rapidly and disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs) need to be used much earlier than previously.
- Leflunomide is an immunomodulatory agent with a novel mode of action which is thought to inhibit de novo pyrimidine synthesis.
- Studies have shown that leflunomide has comparable efficacy to that of sulphasalazine and methotrexate, both widely prescribed drugs for the treatment of RA.
- Leflunomide has shown significant improvement in the functional scores compared with both placebo and sulphasalazine therapy.
- Leflunomide's onset of action can be seen as early as 4 weeks after starting treatment, earlier than most existing DMARDs.